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ABSTRACT

Since 1988, Public/Private Ventures of Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) has been conducting a series of studies of mentoring programs for at-risk youth. As part of this effort, the recruitment and screening procedures used by Big Brother/Big Sister (BB/BS) agencies were studied in eight cities. Recruitment for the high-profile BB/BS agencies is not as difficult as it is for some programs, but program administrators generally do not recruit as many minority-group volunteers as they would like. A volunteer must complete an application, attend an orientation, pass a criminal-records check, give references, and attend a training session. The personal interview is the centerpiece of the screening process. Across the agencies, fewer than half those who inquired actually initiated the process, and only approximately one-fourth actually were matched with students. Recommendations are made for the improvement of the volunteer-intake process, with special attention to the initial request for information. Five tables and two figures present study information. An appendix describes the study methodology. (Contains 15 references.) (SLD)

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Big Brothers/ Big Sisters

A Study of Volunteer Recruitment and Screening

Phoebe A. Roaf
Joseph P. Tierney
Danista E. I. Hunte

UD 030 185

Fall 1994

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With many of the nation's youth facing tremendous challenges caused by deteriorating family structure, living conditions and socioeconomic status, recent years have seen the emergence of mentoring programs as a means of improving children's future prospects. However, while there is a strong volunteer ethic in America, the demand for mentoring exceeds the supply of adults who are able, appropriate and available to serve in this capacity. Even Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BB/BS), the best-known mentoring program, is not immune to the problems associated with recruiting appropriate volunteers.

Since 1988, Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) has been conducting a series of studies that examine the program practices and effectiveness of mentoring interventions. These include a review of six campus-based mentoring programs affiliated with the Campus Partners In Learning Program, four intergenerational mentoring programs developed by Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning, and a P/PV pilot program that examines whether mentoring programs can be integrated in the juvenile justice system.

The cornerstone of P/PV's mentoring initiative is our four-study review of programs associated with Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America (BB/BSA). The first study, completed in Winter 1993, documented how the BB/BS program model is implemented. Two studies are currently under way: one of the relationships formed by the volunteer and child, and one of the impact of these relationships. The other study, the subject of this report, examines the recruitment and screening procedures utilized by eight BB/BS agencies. Funding from the Lilly Endowment, an anonymous donor, The Commonwealth Fund and The Pew Charitable Trusts enabled P/PV to conduct this assessment.

Questions addressed in the study include: How do BB/BS agencies recruit potential volunteers? Who is most likely to respond to current outreach efforts? What techniques are used to attract minority volunteers? How long does it take a potential volunteer to complete the process? Does the likelihood that a potential volunteer will complete an application or be matched vary by type of applicant (age, gender, race, education level)? Ultimately, the goal of the screening process is to separate safe and committed volunteers from those who are inappropriate. The answers to the questions presented here are intended to assist mentoring programs as they consider which procedures to implement for screening mentors.

Eight BB/BS agencies that employ varying recruitment and screening methods were selected to participate in the volunteer applicant pool study. We studied BB/BS programs in the following metropolitan areas: Indianapolis, Indiana; San Antonio, Texas; Chicago, Illinois; Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Rochester, New York; Wichita, Kansas; and Phoenix, Arizona.

Between February and July 1993, agency staff collected demographic information from all persons who inquired about volunteering. They also recorded the dates for each step in the

volunteer screening process that applicants completed between February and October 1993. Researchers visited four of the study agencies in Summer 1993; they interviewed agency personnel, reviewed the files of recently rejected volunteers, and conducted focus groups with volunteers from various stages of the screening process. Staff involved with volunteer recruitment and screening from the other four agencies were interviewed during the BB/BSA national conference in June 1993.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

Between February and July 1993, the eight study agencies received inquiries from 2,532 individuals. Seventy-four percent of those inquiring were white; 58 percent were female. Potential volunteers were fairly young, with 66 percent of inquiries coming from persons under 30 years of age. As a group, potential volunteers also had a high level of education. Ten percent had attended graduate school after college, an additional 33 percent had completed college, and 38 percent had attended but did not complete college. Only 14 percent had completed only high school or earned a GED.

BB/BS advertising campaigns and public service announcements have contributed to the high name recognition that the program enjoys, and thus increased the probability of an individual choosing to volunteer with a BB/BS agency. Agency staff said the two recruitment strategies that attract the largest number of volunteers are television coverage and word-of-mouth. Local agencies receive three types of television coverage: periodic segments broadcast during the local evening news that highlight a youth who is waiting for a volunteer; public service announcements that are shown at the discretion of local stations; and paid advertisements for fundraising activities.

Word-of-mouth recruitment includes a campaign called the Recruitment Challenge!, which aims to generate interest in volunteering among the friends and family members of matched volunteers. As part of this Challenge!, these matched volunteers personally convey their enjoyment of the program, and the need for additional mentors.

As with other mentoring programs, BB/BS agencies have been unable to recruit as many minority volunteers as they would like. BB/BSA has made the recruitment of minority volunteers a top priority. In 1990, it issued a volunteer recruitment manual for agencies that outlines ways to increase the participation rates of minority volunteers; nationwide, the total number of minority volunteers increased from 8,365 in 1990 (15% of total volunteers) to 11,341 in 1992 (16% of total volunteers). Staff from seven study agencies said they employ minority recruitment strategies, such as advertising or seeking publicity in newspapers or on radio stations with predominantly minority audiences and developing informal links with minority organizations.

THE VOLUNTEER INTAKE PROCESS

BB/BSA requires that agencies have volunteers complete an application, attend an orientation, pass a criminal records check, submit the names and addresses of several references, participate in a one- to two-hour personal interview, undergo a home assessment and attend a training session. The goal of this volunteer intake process is to help BB/BS agencies identify safe and committed volunteers and screen out those who are inappropriate.

When a volunteer applies, they must first meet the agency's objective screening criteria. If a volunteer fails to meet any of these criteria--for example, if a recent felony is discovered--his or her application is immediately rejected. Once an applicant meets all objective screening criteria, the performance and judgment of staff becomes crucial in determining whether an applicant is eventually matched.

The screening process typically begins with the initial inquiry--usually a telephone call and often an applicant's first personal contact with the agency. The performance of agency staff during the initial inquiry can have a tremendous effect. Focus group participants who decided not to continue in the intake process often cited a negative initial encounter with agency staff as a contributing factor. Some reported that staff refused to answer all their questions during the inquiry call.

The performance of agency staff at orientation sessions is similarly important. While most focus group participants said they were satisfied with the level of information presented at the orientation, a few expressed dissatisfaction that the person conducting the orientation was ill-informed about agency procedures or did not have enough time to answer all their questions.

Agency staff describe the personal interview as the centerpiece of the screening process and the most significant source of information relating to the subjective eligibility criteria. The primary goal of the personal interview is to determine whether applicants might pose a safety risk to the child or be unlikely to honor their commitment. Many applicants expressed surprise at the thoroughness of the personal interview and the nature of the questions that were posed. However, most said that on reflection, they understood why such care was necessary. Several also commented that staff's willingness to answer questions put them at ease during the personal interview.

Once staff have gathered sufficient information on an applicant, the applicant is either accepted or rejected. Agencies differ in how they inform applicants that they have been rejected. Two agencies said they do not provide the reasons for rejection; their management staff attributed this to concern about lawsuits and the danger of placing case managers in an uncomfortable position. However, focus group participants from these agencies indicated that they were surprised and disappointed on learning they would not be told the reason if rejected.

LENGTH, ATTRITION AND RESULTS OF THE VOLUNTEER INTAKE PROCESS

Across the eight study agencies, fewer than half (43.4%) of volunteers making an inquiry during the study period went on to initiate the application process, and only about one-fourth of those had been matched by the end of the study period: 27.8 percent of the 1,099 applicants had been assigned a Little Brother or Little Sister, 7.4 percent had successfully completed all screening procedures but were not yet matched, 29.8 percent were resolved-not matched (applicant either withdrew voluntarily or was considered by staff to be inappropriate for the program), and 35 percent were unresolved (had not completed all the steps in the process). That 35 percent of applicants were unresolved after being under consideration from three to nine months indicates that the process does not always proceed in a timely fashion.

We examined how the likelihood of reaching various steps in the screening process was influenced by race/gender, education level, age and agency, holding other factors constant. We found that the probability of applying did not differ by the race/gender or age of an individual during the study period. However, there were significant differences by education level: those with a college degree were significantly more likely to apply than those without one.

Minority female applicants, and white male applicants who had completed the personal interview, were more likely to be matched than other applicants. We believe minority female applicants might fare better than white female applicants simply because more white females apply than there are white girls on the waiting lists; thus, agency staff match fewer white volunteers. However, we cannot similarly explain why minority males are less likely to be matched, particularly since so many minority boys are on agency waiting lists.

Applicants with a college education were more likely to be matched during the study period than those with less education. The greater attrition among noncollege-educated volunteers during the screening process might be a result of either self-selection (volunteers might realize they cannot meet all program requirements or are not sufficiently interested); a failure to meet the criteria established by agencies; or a staff preference for college-educated mentors. However, college-educated applicants who completed the personal interview were no more likely to be matched than those with less education who made it to this stage. This indicates that noncollege-educated persons were more likely to withdraw from the process as a result of something that occurred prior to the personal interview. Once past that stage in the process, they were on a par with other candidates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our review, we encourage BB/BS agencies and other mentoring programs to consider the following suggestions when recruiting and screening volunteers:

1. Agencies should continue efforts to develop targeted recruitment strategies. Across our mentoring studies, we have found that using one set of recruitment materials is unlikely to

attract a diverse group of volunteers. Recruiting from different ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds necessitates multiple strategies. Given that most parents and BB/BS agency staff say they would like children to be matched with an adult of the same race, and that minority boys are disproportionately represented on BB/BS agency waiting lists, specific minority outreach strategies are vital.

2. Agency management should carefully monitor all interactions between staff and volunteers during the screening process, particularly the inquiry call. The importance of this first contact should not be minimized, since more than half (56.6%) of those who inquired about BB/BS volunteer opportunities during the study period decided not to go further in the process. Self-selection undoubtedly accounts for a substantial portion of this attrition; however, agencies should monitor whether unnecessary attrition is being caused by staff handling inquiries improperly or inconsistently.

3. The differential in the likelihood that college-educated and noncollege-educated persons will reach the interview stage merits further study. While the difference is likely the result of either self-selection, agency screening criteria, or staff preference, BB/BS agencies must determine exactly why noncollege-educated persons are more likely to abandon the process early.

4. Agencies should monitor the time it takes to resolve volunteer applications. A screening process so lengthy that about one-third (35%) of all applications were unresolved after more than eight months could certainly deter otherwise appropriate volunteers from continuing. Staff's need to simultaneously perform a wide variety of duties might be contributing to this problem. While BB/BS agencies do establish maximum caseloads for case managers to ensure a high level of supervision, they must also balance the case managers' other responsibilities so applications can be resolved more quickly.

Since this study does not examine the match itself, it cannot determine whether the volunteer intake process employed by BB/BS agencies achieves its ultimate goal--the identification of safe and committed mentors. However, it represents the first step in this process. Two studies that are now under way--one of the relationships formed by the volunteer and child, and one of the impact of these relationships--will enable us to examine the interaction between volunteers and youth after they are matched.

I. INTRODUCTION

With many of the nation's youth facing tremendous challenges caused by deteriorating family structure, living conditions and socioeconomic status, recent years have seen the emergence of mentoring programs as a means of improving children's future prospects. The proliferation of mentoring programs has focused the spotlight on the pool of adults who are willing, able, appropriate and available to work in this capacity.

Evidence indicates that this is a considerable pool. In a survey conducted by The Gallup Organization in 1991, an estimated 94 million persons--51 percent of those 18 or older--reported volunteering an average of 4.2 hours per week (Hodgkinson et al., 1992). While those figures suggest a strong volunteer ethic, it has not been sufficient to meet the demand created by the mentoring explosion. Most programs report that recruiting adequate numbers of volunteer mentors--who are required to give substantial amounts of time, consistently and over extended periods--remains a problem.

This is even the case for Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America (BB/BSA), the oldest and best-established mentoring program in the country.[1] BB/BSA has been in operation for 90 years, and currently oversees 504 Big Brothers/Big Sisters agencies in 50 states. Data from 435 BB/BS agencies in 1992 show that approximately 60,000 youth were matched with adult mentors; however, another 31,000 youth could be found on program waiting lists (BB/BSA, 1992a).

This study examines the volunteer recruitment and screening practices of BB/BS agencies. Given the large number of youth waiting for mentors, it is important that agencies recruit, screen, train and match as many appropriate volunteers as possible--and as quickly as possible. By understanding how volunteers respond to the recruitment and screening process, agencies will be better equipped to achieve their ultimate goal--matching appropriate volunteers with youth.

The key questions to be addressed in the report are:

- How do BB/BS agencies recruit potential volunteers?
- Who is most likely to respond to current outreach efforts?
- What techniques are used to attract minority volunteers and how effective are these techniques?
- What is the volunteer screening process?
- Do certain BB/BS practices deter some qualified potential volunteers? (We are concerned not only with the number of individuals who express an interest in the program, but also their suitability for this type of intervention; agency staff seek only those

[1] Throughout this study, the national organization is referred to as BB/BSA, the local agencies as BB/BS agencies.

adults who show commitment to the program and to providing a safe environment for youth.)

- How long does it take a potential volunteer to complete the process? Does the likelihood that a potential volunteer will complete an application or be matched vary by type of applicant (age, gender, race, education level)?

P/PV'S RESEARCH INITIATIVE

In 1988, P/PV embarked on a six-year exploration of the research and policy implications of creating adult mentoring relationships for at-risk youth. The research agenda was designed to test the hypothesis that such relationships can facilitate positive adolescent development. The cornerstone of the research initiative is a four-year evaluation of BB/BSA that addresses many broad questions rarely examined in programs that facilitate relationships between adults and youth.

The BB/BSA research effort involves four separate studies of important operational issues, each designed to inform the others. The first study (Furano et al., 1993) documented how the BB/BS program model is implemented--specifically, whether its mandated elements are effective in facilitating meetings between youth and adults. The final two studies are currently under way. The first focuses on content, process and practices of relationships formed by the Big Brothers or Big Sisters with their Little Brothers or Little Sisters. The second is designed to determine whether, in the aggregate, relationships with Big Brothers and Big Sisters facilitate positive outcomes for youth (e.g., improved school performance and pro-social behavior).

This study of the BB/BS volunteer applicant pool is the second to be completed. The report examines the process of becoming a volunteer from inquiry to match. Our review assessed recruitment activities and the major components of the screening process, and identified whether the experience of potential volunteers (i.e., likelihood of inquiring, applying following an inquiry, completing all steps in the process, and being matched with a Little Brother or Little Sister) varies according to the gender, age, race and education level of applicants.

Study Sites

From the network of BB/BS agencies, we selected a manageable number to represent the breadth, depth and variety of BB/BS operations. Agency participation in the study was sought through presentations of the research agenda at BB/BSA's national conference, and through an agency survey that requested a detailed profile of philosophy, participants and practices. We visited 26 agencies, choosing 15 for participation in one or more of the four studies. Eight of these agencies participated in this volunteer applicant pool study. The 15 research sites are listed in Table 1.

Table 1
BB/BSA RESEARCH SITES

BB/BS of Alamo Area, Inc.*
San Antonio, Texas

BB/BS of Metropolitan Chicago*
Chicago, Illinois

BB/BS Association of Columbus and Franklin County, Inc.
Columbus, Ohio

BB/BS of Forsyth County, Inc.*
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

BB&S of Houston
Houston, Texas

BB of Greater Indianapolis*
Indianapolis, Indiana

BS of Central Indiana, Inc.
Indianapolis, Indiana

BB/BS of Jackson County, Inc.
Jackson, Michigan

BB/BS of Marin
San Rafael, California

BB/BS of Greater Minneapolis
Minneapolis, Minnesota

BB/BS Association of Philadelphia, Inc.*
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Community Partners for Youth, Inc.*
Rochester, New York

BB&S of Sedgwick County, Inc.*
Wichita, Kansas

BB&S of Spokane
Spokane, Washington

Valley BB/BS*
Phoenix, Arizona

* Agencies that participated in the volunteer applicant pool study.

The following criteria were used to select the agencies:

- Geographic distribution throughout the country;
- Different caseload sizes; and
- Varying recruitment and screening methods.

The eight agencies included in this study are not a random sample of BB/BS sites, nor are they representative of either the best or the worst in the sample. While we cannot generalize to all agencies from these eight, we can explore both best practices and trends that indicate the need for further examination of how the process works. The following eight agencies participated:

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Alamo Area, Inc. (San Antonio, Texas) was founded in 1977 and serves metropolitan San Antonio, which includes the city and seven surrounding counties. BB/BS of Alamo Area was overseeing 254 matches and had 342 children on its waiting list in Fall 1993.

Big Brothers of Greater Indianapolis serves the city of Indianapolis and seven surrounding counties. In addition to its central office, it shares a satellite office with the Big Sisters agency serving the same area. The only discrete agency in the study (serving boys only), BB of Indianapolis was managing 593 matches and had 320 children on its waiting list.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Metropolitan Chicago began providing matches for boys in 1967, for girls in 1977. The service area includes Cook County. BB/BS of Chicago had 158 youth matched and 33 on the waiting list.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Forsyth County, Inc. (Winston-Salem, North Carolina) was founded as a combined agency in 1977 and serves Forsyth County. It supervised 172 matches and had 92 children on the waiting list.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters Association of Philadelphia, Inc. serves the city of Philadelphia and Delaware County. Big Brothers of Philadelphia was formed in 1915 and added services for girls in 1978. BB/BS of Philadelphia was overseeing 683 matches and had 181 children who had been processed and were waiting to be matched.

Valley Big Brothers/Big Sisters (Phoenix, Arizona) serves Maricopa County, including the greater Phoenix metropolitan area, as well as the cities of Mesa and Scottsdale. The agency was formed in 1986 when separate Big Sisters and Big Brothers agencies merged. Valley Big Brothers/Big Sisters was supervising 696 matches and had 478 children on the waiting list.

Community Partners for Youth, Inc. is located in Rochester, New York, and serves a catchment area that includes the city of Rochester and the surrounding area. In operation for

13 years prior to affiliation with BB/BSA in 1982, Community Partners for Youth was formed by the merger of two previously existing United Way agencies. Community Partners for Youth was managing 553 matches and had 396 children on the waiting list at the end of 1992.

Big Brothers and Sisters of Sedgwick County, Inc. serves Wichita and the four surrounding counties. The agency was formed in 1978 when the county's Big Brothers and Big Sisters agencies merged. BB/BS of Sedgwick County was overseeing 680 matches and had 890 children on the waiting list.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

All eight agencies were asked to collect demographic information from persons who inquired about volunteering between February and July 1993, and to record the dates when each applicant completed each step in the volunteer intake process between February and October 1993. During Summer 1993, two of the authors visited four of the study agencies to interview agency personnel and review the files of recently rejected volunteers. Staff involved with volunteer recruitment and screening at the other four agencies were interviewed during the BB/BSA national conference in June 1993. To understand how volunteers respond to the recruitment and screening process, the authors conducted focus groups at the four agencies that were visited during Summer 1993. See the Appendix for more details on the methodology.

The report documents findings from these data collection efforts. Chapter II presents a demographic profile of individuals who made inquiries over the six-month period and describes the volunteer recruitment strategies employed by the study agencies. Chapter III describes the major steps in the volunteer intake process, including their purpose, content and length. Chapter IV reports the length of time it takes to complete the intake process, and analyzes the effect of race, gender, age and education on the likelihood that an applicant will be matched with a child. Chapter V presents conclusions and recommendations.

II. VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT

Educating the general public about volunteer opportunities available through BB/BS is one of the primary goals of agency recruitment efforts. To accomplish this, agencies conduct volunteer recruitment on an ongoing basis rather than as a set of discrete activities. While agencies do conduct recruitment campaigns, every interaction with the public, including fundraising activities, is viewed as an opportunity to recruit.

Staff seek to maintain high name recognition and local visibility in the hope that when individuals decide to volunteer, BB/BSA will be the first organization that comes to mind. Both BB/BSA and local BB/BS agencies have been extremely successful in promoting the program's message. A 1992 Gallup Poll indicates that BB/BSA is the third most recognized youth-serving organization in the country, following Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. This is a considerable accomplishment, given that BB/BSA serves only about 60,000 youth (BB/BSA, 1992a)--in contrast to the approximately seven million youth who participate in Scouting annually (World Almanac, 1992).

However, given the large number of youth who continue to wait, agencies still face the challenge of recruiting a sufficient number of volunteers. Each year, BB/BS agencies get fewer volunteers than they do children seeking services. At the eight agencies participating in this study, 2,732 youth were on waiting lists and 3,789 youth were matched in Fall 1993.

This chapter begins by describing potential volunteers who requested information from the eight study agencies over a six-month period. Recruitment strategies regularly employed by agencies--including those targeting minority volunteers--are then highlighted.

VOLUNTEER PROFILE

To determine exactly who expresses interest in BB/BS volunteer opportunities, staff from the eight study agencies were asked to collect data over a six-month period from all persons who inquired about volunteering.[2] Detailed data on all who inquired were necessary so that we could compare those who eventually became matched volunteers with those who did not.

The eight study agencies received inquiries from 2,532 individuals between February and July 1993. According to staff, this did not include the period in which agencies receive the majority of their volunteer inquiries: during the fall and the holiday season, typically from September to January. Table 2 illustrates how the number of inquiries varied across agencies, ranging from 146 to 498 for the period. The majority of inquiries came from females (58%),

[2] Only persons who inquired about the traditional one-to-one match were included as part of these data. Those interested in couples matches were excluded from study data.

Table 2

RACE, AGE AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF ADULTS INQUIRING ABOUT SERVING AS A BIG BROTHER OR BIG SISTER

	Agency A	Agency B	Agency C	Agency D	Agency E	Agency F	Agency G	Agency H	Total
Total Inquiries	451	498	301	475	246	146	240	175	2,532
Race									
White	51%	86%	76%	82%	64%	80%	73%	74%	74%
Black	45	4	20	11	11	20	23	25	18
Hispanic	2	6	1	2	22	--	2	1	5
Other	2	4	3	5	3	--	2	1	3
	N=338	N=484	N=285	N=449	N=245	N=133	N=239	N=175	N=2, 348
Age									
Less than 20	4%	1%	8%	13%	8%	1%	--	7%	6%
20 - 24	41	30	34	36	33	36	29	32	34
25 - 29	27	24	28	26	19	29	35	24	26
30 - 34	14	17	9	9	16	14	21	18	14
35 - 39	7	11	8	6	9	8	6	8	8
40+	7	16	12	11	15	12	9	12	12
	N=339	N=487	N=276	N=439	N=244	N=134	N=226	N=170	N=2, 315

Table 2 (continued)

RACE, AGE AND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT OF ADULTS INQUIRING ABOUT SERVING AS A BIG BROTHER OR BIG SISTER

	Agency A	Agency B	Agency C	Agency D	Agency E	Agency F	Agency G	Agency H	Total
Educational Attainment									
Less than High School	1%	--	4%	4%	2%	--	--	1%	2%
High School Diploma/GED	16	11	13	21	14	9	9	12	14
Vocational School	2	2	2	3	1	7	2	2	2
Some College	37	40	40	43	43	22	29	34	38
College Graduate	33	34	31	23	31	46	45	34	33
More than College	9	11	10	6	9	14	14	14	10
Other	2	1	--	--	--	2	--	2	1
	N=324	N=489	N=273	N=450	N=246	N=127	N=236	N=175	N=2,320

-- Indicates less than 1 percent.

NOTE: Gender data are not reported because doing so would identify the agency that serves only boys.

consistent with local and BB/BSA staff reports that more women than men volunteer.[3] Most potential volunteers were white (74%). Blacks constituted 18 percent of the inquiries; Hispanics 5 percent; and persons of other races 3 percent. Across agencies, 66 percent of potential volunteers were under 30 years of age.

As a group, potential volunteers had a high level of education. Ten percent had attended graduate school after college, an additional 33 percent had completed college, and 38 percent had attended but did not complete college. Fourteen percent had completed only high school or earned a GED. While 25 percent of the U.S. population in 1989 had graduated from college (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1991), 43 percent of those inquiring about BB/BS had a college degree. And at Agency F (60%) and Agency G (59%), more than half of those inquiring had at least a college degree.[4]

These figures are consistent with a national survey on volunteerism in America. The 1991 survey indicated that women were more likely to volunteer than men (53% vs. 49%); that whites (53%) were more likely to volunteer than blacks (43%) and Hispanics (38%); and that college graduates (77%) were somewhat more likely to volunteer than those with some post-secondary experience (62%), and far more likely to do so than those with a high school diploma or less (38%) (Hodgkinson et al., 1992).

To understand how potential volunteers respond to the recruitment and screening process, focus group sessions were conducted at four study agencies. Individuals at these sites were placed in one of four groups: Female Inquiry (women who had inquired, but had not submitted an application); Male Inquiry (men who had inquired, but had not submitted an application); Applied-In Process (persons who had submitted an application, but had not been matched at the time of the focus group); and Matched (volunteers who had been matched with a child for less than one year). From these focus groups, we extracted the main themes; in this report, relevant quotations are used where appropriate. When quotations are used, the speaker's status in the screening process is indicated.

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Why do individuals come forward? The following sections examine how the study agencies conduct volunteer recruitment. First, the role of BB/BSA in volunteer recruitment efforts is presented. This is followed by discussions of the local resources devoted to volunteer recruitment, the most common recruitment methods, and any minority recruitment strategies employed.

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[3] Only the seven agencies matching both Big Sisters and Big Brothers were used to calculate this percentage. The agency matching only Big Brothers was excluded.

[4] This report provides an overview of the BB/BSA volunteer recruitment and screening process, and is not intended as an assessment of the participating agencies. Therefore, the eight study agencies are identified by letter rather than name.

Role of Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America

BB/BSA's promotional materials, such as public service announcements, posters and brochures, are generic: they promote the BB/BS name and the benefits that youth can receive from mentors. BB/BSA has also prepared materials to assist agencies in recruiting minorities and males.

However, BB/BSA plays a limited role in local agencies' volunteer recruitment efforts. Of the eight study agencies, only one reported using BB/BSA recruitment materials. BB/BSA staff reported that the materials are primarily used by smaller affiliates without the resources to develop their own. Both BB/BSA and local staff feel agencies, being more familiar with their communities, are better able to develop materials congruent with local norms and standards.

Local Resources Devoted to Volunteer Recruitment

To spur volunteer recruitment, agencies use television and radio coverage; word-of-mouth efforts involving current volunteers and board members; speeches before community and professional groups; written materials; and articles in local newspapers to maintain a high level of community visibility and remind interested persons that BB/BS volunteer opportunities exist.

Three of the eight study agencies have full-time recruitment specialists, and three have part-time recruiters. These recruiters have primary responsibility for coordinating and implementing the agency's major recruitment drives as well as handling local speaking engagements. At all agencies, case managers--who have bachelor's or master's degrees, typically in social work--are responsible for conducting volunteer screening, but also become involved periodically in outreach efforts. For example, some make presentations before groups of potential volunteers as the need arises. The two smallest agencies, which do not have recruiters, require that all staff contribute a portion of their time to recruitment activities.

The costs associated with developing recruitment materials are typically covered by local advertising agencies' donation of staff time. In addition, agency budgets include line items for photocopying and mailing information to potential volunteers, as well as for advertising through the local media.

Television Coverage and Word-of-Mouth

Agency staff said that television coverage and word-of-mouth were the recruitment strategies that attracted the largest number of volunteers.

Local agencies receive three types of television coverage. In four of the markets, television stations run periodic segments that highlight a youth who is waiting for a volunteer or has been recently matched. Typically called "Wednesday's Child," these segments personalize the

BB/BS program by providing information about a particular child. Waiting-list children talk about the activities they are interested in; recently matched youth are shown engaged in a recreational or educational activity with their Big Brother or Big Sister. These segments are designed specifically to attract potential volunteers and are broadcast during the local evening news, which reaches a sizeable audience.

Public service announcements (PSAs) are a second means of attracting volunteer inquiries. Agencies submit to television stations PSAs that typically include scenes of adults and youth interacting. PSAs differ from "Wednesday's Child" segments in that agencies typically have no control over when they appear. Staff reported that PSAs tend to be broadcast in the early hours of the morning, when there are few viewers. This is not surprising, since stations reserve the more highly viewed hours for paid advertisements.

Six of the study agencies pay for prime television or radio air time to publicize fundraising activities. Although the primary purpose of fundraising spots is to encourage individuals to support the program financially, they also help agencies maintain name recognition.

Focus group participants confirmed the comments of agency staff about how potential volunteers learn about BB/BS services. Some focus group participants stated they had been aware of the program for so long that they could no longer remember how they first learned about it. However, the most common source of information mentioned was television advertisements, including PSAs that featured a Big and a Little engaged in some activity of daily living and the "Wednesday's Child" segments that appeared as a feature story during the local news. Other respondents indicated that they had learned of the program through signs on public transportation, college fairs, neighborhood newspapers and the radio:

> They'd have their weekly segment [where] one of the reporters would go out . . . and bring in one of the small boys, small girls . . . and have a one- or two-minute segment on the news. They'd get them [at] the park or downtown. (Male Inquiry)

> Actually, I saw an ad on TV late at night . . . [and] it touched me. This one was more targeted toward the ethnic thing because it had a little boy in the school yard and a black man talking to him. (Male Inquiry)

While the advertising campaigns used by local agencies have been successful in maintaining high name recognition, they are often very general in nature. They typically do not list program requirements or expectations, and they do little to correct any misperceptions about the program that might exist among the general public.

Although we did not speak with anyone who had not contacted an agency, some focus group participants had ideas about why others might be hesitant to come forward. Their comments suggest that at least some individuals perceive that only professionals or persons willing to spend money on the child will be welcomed by the program:

I thought I wasn't the kind of person they were looking for. I wanted to do it real bad . . . but I was always under the impression that they were looking for a professional. I graduated high school, I've held jobs in my life, but I can't call myself a professional . . . they were looking for somebody to be a role model in a professional way. (Female Inquiry)

A lot of people say you have to have all these resources to be able to help a kid. You have to have time resources, which is a big one, but then you also have to have money . . . I think a lot of people think that you really have to be well-off to be able to do this. (Matched)

It was almost like you had to take them somewhere . . . I had the feeling that they expected you to do more with them than just spend time with them . . . It didn't make me feel like I could just sit here and talk with this child. (Male Inquiry)

I think a lot of people probably wait a little bit to do something like this because they have that idea that they're gonna be footing the bill . . . the people that I met at the orientation all seemed to be professionals. (Applied-In Process)

One means of ensuring that accurate information is conveyed is to have persons involved in the program work to recruit additional mentors. Therefore, seven study agencies conduct an annual competition called the Recruitment Challenge!--or the Challenge!--to attract additional volunteers via word-of-mouth. The Challenge! typically involves case managers, board members, matched volunteers and parents of matched youth. Matched volunteers personally convey their enjoyment of the program to family members and friends, and send out a call for additional mentors. Each case manager coordinates the team formed by his or her caseload, with two or more volunteers chairing the team and making most of the follow-up calls. A kick-off party, pep rally and prizes contribute to an atmosphere of involvement, fun and competition that helps to inspire participants and attract eligible volunteers.

Many volunteers who participated in focus groups mentioned that they received information from family members, friends and co-workers who served as Bigs. Agencies conduct the Challenge! as a formal recruitment activity; however, volunteers indicated that informal recruitment also occurs among friends and family:

Having a client of mine explain the benefits of this relationship--somebody who's in the program--really made a lot more impact on me than just the media. (Applied-In Process)

[Ten years ago], my older sister was a Big Sister, so I kind of got involved a little bit with her. (Applied-In Process)

> The director of security where I work is a Big Brother. He's been a Big Brother for 10 years and I was just chatting with him one day . . . and he gave me the name of a contact person here. (Female Inquiry)

MINORITY RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

A considerable proportion of parents seeking BB/BS services prefer that their children be matched with mentors of a similar racial or ethnic background, and BB/BS agencies try to accommodate this preference. Because the traditional television and word-of-mouth strategies have not produced adequate minority volunteers, a large proportion of waiting-list youth are minority. Many agencies have found it necessary to take specific steps to attract this group. Staff from seven study agencies said they make special efforts to increase the participation rates of minority volunteers.

National Strategies for Minority Recruitment

Over the past decade, BB/BSA has made the recruitment of minorities a top priority. While data comparing the effectiveness of cross-race and same-race matches are limited, agency staff say they attempt to provide a mentor from the same racial or ethnic background as the child whenever possible--particularly if the parent requests it. Given that more minority children than white youth are on waiting lists (63% of waiting youth at the study agencies were minority), additional minority volunteers are sorely needed.

Studies have shown that volunteers have a tendency to work with programs serving those of similar racial and ethnic backgrounds. A 1990 survey indicates that the majority of blacks from all socioeconomic backgrounds give most of their volunteer time to organizations run by blacks or to organizations that primarily serve blacks. More than 80 percent of black professionals reported devoting at least half of their volunteer time to "black" organizations (Carson, 1990).

BB/BSA issued its recommendations regarding the recruitment of minorities in 1987 (BB/BSA, 1992b). In 1990, these recommendations became the basis for an initiative titled "PASS IT ON: The Minority Mentorship Campaign." As part of this campaign, agencies piloted several approaches to volunteer recruitment, including increased involvement with minority media; training for staff, board members and volunteers; and the creation of ethnic and minority advisory councils.

A product of PASS IT ON was a volunteer recruitment manual for local agencies that encouraged them to identify and develop linkages with ethnic professional, social and religious organizations; diversify their boards and staff; and develop culturally relevant materials. Nationwide, the total number of minority volunteers has increased since the PASS IT ON initiative. In 1990, 8,365 volunteers (15%) were minorities (BB/BSA, 1990). By 1992, this number had risen to 11,341 volunteers (16%) (BB/BSA, 1992a). Although the one point

percentage increase is slight, this represents a 36 percent increase in the number of minority volunteers.

Most staff said the recruitment of minority volunteers continues to be a difficult challenge. BB/BS agencies are not alone in this regard; obtaining additional minority volunteers is a concern expressed by staff from many mentoring programs (Bailey, 1993).

Local Strategies for Minority Recruitment

We examined the extent to which study agencies currently employ the targeted recruitment strategies suggested in PASS IT ON.[5] All study agencies use either newspapers or radio stations with predominantly minority audiences to recruit volunteers. Three agencies have advisory councils or committees specifically designed to address minority volunteer recruitment. Six study agencies have informal links with minority organizations, such as churches and fraternities, and make recruitment presentations at their meetings. All agencies have culturally relevant recruitment materials, ranging from brochures explicitly targeting minority groups to materials including a minority group representative.

Despite these efforts, several minority volunteers who participated in focus groups believe that there was limited knowledge of the program among potential volunteers within their communities, indicating that there might be a need for further outreach efforts:

> [Advertising] is really important in the black community. There's a shortage of them [black volunteers] so are they doing anything about it? There's successful people that are there and they're not tapping into that resource. (Matched)

> More Anglos are aware of it because a lot of them are sponsors . . . the [Hispanic] community hears some things . . . but I think once they start getting the word out, more [will come forward]. (Matched)

While there is no conclusive evidence regarding effective strategies for minority recruitment, other mentoring programs have tried several approaches. A study of two programs that provide mentors for adjudicated youth (Mecartney, Styles and Morrow, 1994) reported that one program successfully worked with the local chapter of the NAACP to spur minority recruitment. A study of campus-based mentoring programs (Tierney and Branch, 1992) reported that program staff made targeted presentations to minority student organizations, enlisted the support of minority student leaders, and encouraged word-of-mouth recruitment among members of the minority community. BB/BSA recently began an initiative with Alpha Phi Alpha, a national black collegiate fraternal organization; local chapters of the fraternity agreed to encourage their members to become Big Brothers to the black male youth waiting to be matched.

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[5] We did not determine whether each agency began using these strategies before or after BB/BSA issued its 1990 recommendations.

P/PV's report on program practices among BB/BS agencies (Furano et al., 1993) found that an agency's racial composition at both the local board and staff levels appears to influence its capacity to recruit minority volunteers. The percentage of matched minority volunteers was higher at agencies where minority staff assisted or were responsible for minority recruitment. While we do not know whether these agencies had similar percentages of minority volunteers prior to hiring minority staff, agency staff believe the presence of minority case managers has facilitated minority recruitment.

III. THE VOLUNTEER INTAKE PROCESS

Because the BB/BS program matches an unrelated adult in an unchaperoned one-to-one relationship with a child, local agencies focus on safety and commitment issues during the volunteer screening process. To find a responsible and conscientious adult who will work well with a child, agency staff screen volunteers according to both objective and subjective criteria.

The process is detailed and often lengthy. Figure 1 lists the usual sequence of steps. BB/BSA requires agencies to have volunteers complete an application, attend an orientation, pass a criminal records check, submit the names and addresses of several references, participate in a comprehensive one- to two-hour personal interview, undergo a home assessment conducted by a staff member and attend a training session (BB/BSA, 1988). Three study agencies also administer psychological tests to potential volunteers, and four check volunteers' driving records.

During the screening process, the agency gets a sense of the volunteer, and the volunteer learns about the agency and what it means to be a Big Brother or Big Sister. Agency staff inform the volunteer of the time commitment required, usually three to five hours per week for one year. They also encourage applicants to withdraw their applications at any point in the process if they become uncertain about either their commitment or their ability to serve.

This chapter discusses the criteria used to evaluate applicants, the process by which agencies collect the data necessary to assess candidates, and volunteers' reactions to the process.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

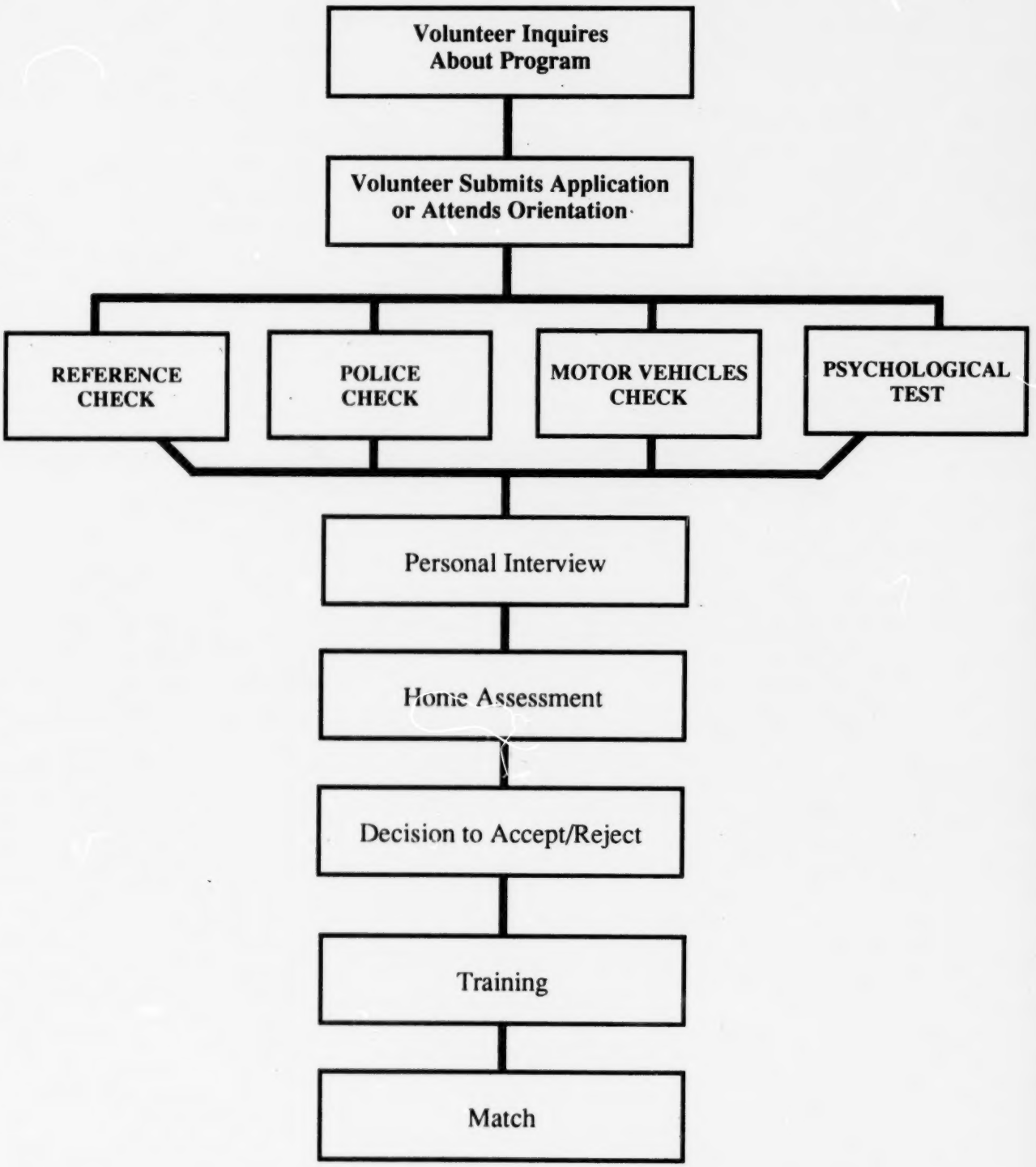
Every agency establishes objective eligibility criteria and automatically excludes any applicant not meeting them. The eight study agencies stipulate that applicants meet a minimum age requirement (typically 18 to 21), have access to appropriate transportation, have no current substance abuse problem, and have an acceptable driving history (e.g., no recent drunk driving convictions). Specific criminal actions, such as felonious assault, also automatically exclude a volunteer.

Three agencies have residency requirements (three to six months in the service area), and staff from three agencies have said that they will not match homosexual volunteers. One agency requires that volunteers have full-time jobs, and another that volunteers have no children under age 16 residing in their household.

In addition to these criteria, an applicant must meet less clear-cut criteria: they should be engaged in positive relationships with their family members, adult friends and spouse or dating partner; they must have either had positive childhood experiences or dealt successfully with negative ones; they must demonstrate appropriate attitudes and behaviors regarding

Figure 1

TYPICAL SEQUENCE OF SCREENING STEPS REQUIRED IN MATCHING A BIG BROTHER OR BIG SISTER



There are notable exceptions to this typical sequence: for example, three study agencies require a psychological test, and one agency conducts the home assessment immediately after the volunteer submits his/her application.

sexual issues, as defined by local standards; and they must have a stable employment record with no history of excessive transience.

Additional criteria include a "reasonable" understanding of children, an ability to meet the time commitment and a willingness to work cooperatively with agency staff. Most important, the potential volunteer must not exhibit any warning signs of pedophilia. Agency staff reported that the most significant source of information relating to eligibility is the personal interview, though every interaction between agency staff and applicants contributes to the assessment.

THE SCREENING PROCESS

This section details the major steps in the screening process, beginning with an applicant's initial contact with agency staff. Where appropriate, quotes from potential and matched volunteers who participated in focus groups are included.

Initial Contact

Applicants' first personal contact with the agency typically occurs when they call and express an interest in serving as a Big Brother or Big Sister. For many, the decision to volunteer comes years after they first heard about the program. While some focus group participants said they had been motivated to influence a child's life positively, other commitments had stopped them from volunteering earlier. When they felt their life circumstances were appropriate, however, they contacted an agency:

> I just wanted to wait until my personal life and my work life [were] just right . . . 'cause I know it's a commitment and I just wanted to make sure everything was good in all aspects of my life before I volunteered. (Applied-In Process)

> I called because I've been wanting to get involved for quite some time, but I've been in school . . . Since I knew I was going to be here [for a while] and I'll be more stable . . . I thought it would be a good time to call. (Male Inquiry)

During the initial call, agency staff briefly describe the program and discuss basic eligibility criteria and the required time commitment. Callers who meet the basic eligibility criteria and remain interested are either sent an application or invited to attend an orientation session.

Some agencies will not send applications to volunteers who do not live in areas with waiting youth; according to staff, they have found that volunteers who have to travel significant distances are often unable to fulfill the meeting requirement. Two study agencies have adopted policies that restrict the allowable commute between adult and youth (e.g., no more than 15 to 30 minutes).

In focus groups, however, most volunteers said they were willing to travel further than agency rules permitted. Inquirers at agencies that strictly adhered to geographic limits were quite surprised when they learned their services were not desired. In some instances, this led to negative feelings toward the agency:

> What turned me off the first time--and I decided that I'd try another agency--was that they weren't taking applications because of where I lived, and I was shocked about that . . . I said there are kids who need people in the city and because my address is [suburban], you won't take my application? And she said, "Ma'am, those are the rules." So that kind of turned me off from Big Brothers and Big Sisters. (Applied-In Process)

> I really don't know why they made such a big issue about zip codes . . . [the case manager] said we prefer you being closer, so that you can spend more time with the kid. Which makes sense, but I didn't have a problem. I could care less where the kid lived as long as I was matched . . . [city residents] travel to and from work 35 minutes or whatever. It's not a problem. (Matched)

> I didn't have a problem with it [distance], but it was something that the agency felt was important . . . because my parents live in the area, I'm up there all the time. I said if you want to match me with somebody up there it's not going to be a problem. (Matched)

Responding to queries about the performance of agency staff during the inquiry, a majority of focus group participants said that staff were helpful, friendly and supportive of their decision to volunteer. However, a small number of focus group participants said they felt that staff were hurried and not open to their questions. In the focus group discussions, people who chose not to continue the screening process often cited a negative encounter with agency staff as a contributing factor to this decision. Their comments indicate that at least one agency has a problem with staff behavior during the inquiry call. The following comments are characteristic of callers to this agency:

> I hate to say it, but her attitude is what got me--it made me say, well, forget it. (Applied-In Process)

> I don't think that was the best person to speak to over the phone. If it was somebody else that . . . didn't have any background information on Big Brothers or Big Sisters, they might be deterred or just say forget it. But I'm a persistent person . . . so I just overlooked it and . . . my bigger picture was helping the children and not this person that I was talking to on the phone. (Female Inquiry)

Volunteers who asked questions during the inquiry call wanted them fully answered. In a few cases where inquirers felt their questions were not answered, they did not complete the intake process:

> I would have liked more information over the phone . . . rather than having to come here to find out if it's something [I want to do] . . . If somebody wants questions answered over the phone, they should give them the answers. (Female Inquiry)

Transition to Application or Orientation

Following the initial contact, six of the study agencies send applicants a mailing including program information and/or an application. The information focuses on the program itself, not the screening process, and describes the nature of the relationship between the volunteer and child, the reasons children need such a relationship and the ways in which the volunteer can benefit from participating. The mailing also includes a brief history and description of the agency, and emphasizes the time commitment (usually three to five hours per week for one year). Finally, the mailing lists the steps in the screening process, though little information is given about what each step entails.

Several factors influence whether individuals decide to proceed with the intake process, including their initial motivation for calling the agency, their interaction with agency staff during the inquiry call and additional information sent them after the call. There is substantial fall-off from the inquiry call to the next step in the application process.[6] Based on the data collected for this study, 43.4 percent of persons who inquired about volunteering followed through by applying. On average, about two weeks elapsed between the inquiry call and the agency's receipt of an application from those who applied.

Agencies view attrition from the inquiry call to application differently. Two study agencies try to limit attrition by making repeated reminder calls and sending letters. Others deliberately limit contact between the inquiry call and the application. The latter agencies base their procedure on one of two factors: (1) a belief that if individuals are not motivated to apply on their own, they are unlikely to make the commitment necessary, and (2) a feeling that since previous efforts to limit attrition have failed, staff resources could be invested in a more productive fashion.

To the extent that individuals do not apply because they recognize that they have insufficient time or feel they would not meet all eligibility criteria, early attrition is positive, saving time for both agency staff and the applicant. If, however, potential volunteers base decisions to

[6] Five study agencies require volunteers to submit an application; the other three require the volunteer to attend an orientation as the next step in the application process. For the remainder of the report, we will refer to this as the application.

leave on either negative interactions with agency staff or misconceptions about the nature of the program and its eligibility criteria, the attrition can be damaging to the program.

Application

Every agency requires volunteers to complete an application with their address, race, age, current employment and criminal history, and names and addresses of references. All applicants must sign an agreement to allow the agency access to private information. Several agencies also collect information on the type of child with whom the applicant would like to be matched.

Following receipt of the application, agency staff collect data from references and submit the applicant's name to legal and motor vehicle agencies for background checks. If applicants admit to committing a crime on their application, agency staff inquire about the nature of the crime before proceeding.

Orientation

Three study agencies mandate attendance at a group orientation session before a person submits an application. Three additional agencies offer group sessions after submission of the application. The remaining two study agencies offer one-to-one informal orientation sessions; one of the agencies conducts many of these sessions at recruitment events.

At the group sessions, which generally last about an hour, potential volunteers hear a history of the agency, an outline of agency screening procedures and a list of agency rules (e.g., its policy on overnight visits). Often, there is a presentation by a current Big Brother or Big Sister about his or her experiences as a volunteer. Occasionally, Little Brothers or Little Sisters also attend and share their experiences.

For many potential volunteers, the orientation is their first face-to-face contact with agency staff. Focus group participants said they received general information about the program and learned what would be expected of them during the match. Those with whom we talked appeared satisfied with the level of information provided:

> [They] went through the procedure we would be going through and [gave us] some ideas about what this relationship was going to be about . . . I thought that was really good. It really put me at ease once I got that information, because I was kind of anxious about that. (Applied-In Process)

> They gave you approximate time periods between when things happen, and how long things took . . . There'll be a home visit, and it will take two hours, and it will be a month from the time that we process this. (Matched)

Many focus group participants commented positively on presentations involving matched volunteers and youth. They enjoyed hearing the first-hand experiences of mentors and youth who had overcome difficult points in the match, and the descriptions of activities the pair enjoyed doing together:

> She [Big Sister] was very good 'cause she said the first thing her Little said was, "Okay, where are we going shopping?" So she told us not to overdo [it], if you took 'em to a ball game, do not buy them all these things. (Applied-In Process)

> I heard testimonials from a Big and from a Little . . . what each thought was important and that appealed to me on both sides, so that's why I continued going through the process, and I kind of knew what I was getting into at that point. (Matched)

Focus group participants expressed dissatisfaction when the person conducting the orientation was not well-informed about agency procedures. Other concerns included insufficient time for staff to answer all the volunteers' questions, and an insufficient number of orientation sessions for volunteers. One agency in particular seems to schedule an insufficient number of orientation sessions, as several volunteers complained that they could not reserve a spot for months.

Criminal and Driving Records Check

As part of the screening process, applicants authorize the agency to conduct a criminal records check. Although the extent of the investigation varies, all study agencies at least obtain criminal records from either the city or state in which the agency is located. Two study agencies conduct far more extensive checks. One contacts states in which the applicant lived previously, with particular emphasis on their residence when they were 18 to 25 years old--viewed by staff as a period when persons are most likely to commit a crime. The other requests fingerprint checks from the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

All agencies exclude individuals who have committed violent crimes, crimes against a person, or crimes of a sexual nature. Some agencies will, on a case-by-case basis, disregard youthful indiscretions, such as a disorderly conduct charge while in college.

In addition to the criminal records check, four study agencies conduct a motor vehicles check to uncover driving records suggesting the applicant might pose a safety risk to a child. Although staff exercise discretion in evaluating an applicant's driving record, they generally look for an absence of violations during the previous 12 to 36 months.

Conducting records checks is an objective and relatively easy way to screen out individuals who might pose a safety risk. For those applicants for whom criminal records checks were completed, the process took an average of 23 days (N=687). For those for whom motor

vehicle checks were completed, it took an average of 16 days (N=180).[7] Minimal staff time is devoted to these checks, since staff need only request the records and briefly look at the results to decide whether an applicant is acceptable.

Personal Interview

Agency staff describe the personal interview as the centerpiece of the screening process because it provides an opportunity to "really get to know" the applicant. The interview typically lasts between one and two hours and is usually conducted in the agency's office. Topics covered are similar across agencies. They include the applicant's motivation for applying; understanding of the commitment required; marital and dating situation; family background and relationships with parents and siblings; drug and alcohol use; hobbies; and preferences for the type of child with whom he or she might be matched.

The primary goal of the interview is to determine whether applicants pose a safety risk to the child or are unlikely to honor their commitment. Staff also cited the interview's importance in helping them develop rapport with the applicant and collecting information they can eventually use in making a match.

Five study agencies use highly structured interview instruments, from which they require case managers to ask every question. The other agencies use topic guides; these either suggest questions for each topic or help case managers develop individual strategies for addressing the topic. Highly structured interview guides increase the likelihood that case managers will collect similar information for every volunteer, assist staff who are inexperienced in conducting interviews and provide them with a rationale for asking sensitive questions. Less structured guides might facilitate a comfortable flow during the interview, but are highly dependent on interviewer skill. Case managers who are inexperienced, or feel rushed or intimidated by a volunteer might not adequately address all required topics.

While the content areas covered in the personal interview are generally consistent across agencies, specific questions vary within each area. This is particularly true regarding sexual attitudes and behavior. Agency staff reported two reasons for including questions in these content areas. First, they help staff determine what the volunteer might answer should the youth ask questions about sex. This is an appropriate concern, since many of the youth are at an age at which they are likely to pose such questions. Through asking questions and discussing possible answers, agency staff can prepare volunteers for what they may encounter during the match.

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[7] The data reported for the time it took to complete the criminal records and motor vehicle checks, and to obtain completed references (reported later in the chapter), are only for those applicants for whom the indicated step was completed. Applicants for whom the step had not yet been completed were not included in the calculation. Calculating the length in this manner somewhat understates the actual time it takes to complete each step.

Second, agency staff seek to understand the volunteer's sexual lifestyle. While one study agency does not ask sexual behavior questions, most ask applicants to disclose their sexual orientation and whether they are currently sexually active, and to describe their first sexual experience. At least two study agencies probe even further: one asks the volunteer whether he or she is sexually satisfied; another asks how the volunteer directs his or her sexual energies if not married or dating.

Focus group participants vividly recalled these questions. Those specifically mentioning the sexual behavior questions were about evenly divided in their views of the questions' appropriateness:

> [Questions] about my personal sexual preference, for example. You know, that's my business, but at the same time, after talking about it, I became comfortable because I think it's necessary. I really believe it is necessary to get into that kind of detail especially when . . . you're turning over a kid to a person to go off wherever. (Applied-In Process)

> They're a lot more thorough than I expected, and they asked me a lot of questions . . . like what you do with your partner, and that kind of caught me off guard. But then I understand that we're working with children; they're so precious that you can't afford to let [just] anybody in the program. So it doesn't bother me to go through the process that they've set up. (Female Inquiry)

> The question was how old were you when you lost your virginity. It was like, wait a second here. What does this have to do with being matched? I felt like I was talking to Dr. Ruth for a while there. (Matched)

> I knew they were going to ask me about sex and I thought it was basically do you have sex? . . . And I told her, and she goes do you practice safe sex? I was, like, gosh, that's getting a little deeper and I told her, and she goes, well, what type? I was, like, gosh, how much further am I going to have to go with this? (Applied-In Process)

Agency staff recognize that the interview is filled with personal questions, and make an effort to prepare volunteers for the sensitive nature of the interview. The preparation ranges from stating that the agency conducts a "personal" interview to informing applicants that this will likely be the most intense interview they will have ever gone through. Despite staff efforts to prepare volunteers for the interview, focus group participants frequently expressed surprise at the intensely personal nature of the questions. On reflection, however, most participants thought the questions necessary, given the nature of the program:

> At first, I went home and I was really upset. I thought, I can't believe they'd ask me these questions . . . but I went home and cooled down. The more I thought about it, they have to know who you are. (Applied-In Process)

> I was surprised by the whole depth of the interview process, and frankly, I didn't know that it would be so detailed . . . On reflection, I'm glad that it was, but when I went through the process it was, like, what? (Matched)

When applicants were comfortable with the personal interview, it was largely because of the demeanor of the staff and their willingness to answer questions during the course of the interview. Several applicants said they wanted more information on the purpose of the questions and on how the information collected would be used in the decision-making process:

> I didn't expect it to be those kinds of questions but . . . she explained to me why they were asking the questions and [made] me feel better about answering them. (Applied-In Process)

> One of the questions I had [after the interview] was if I was in counseling, why do you need the records? That was never presented to me. Like the sexual question. If they would have told me why, I would have felt much more comfortable with that. (Applied-In Process)

One question of interest is whether the race and gender of the case manager has an impact on the volunteer's willingness to provide information. This issue is raised in the PASS IT ON manual, which notes that particular discomfort can occur during personal interviews when the case manager and volunteer are of a different gender and/or race (BB/BSA, 1992b). Agency staff and volunteers who participated in focus groups reported no major problems interacting with members of the opposite gender or other races. However, case managers did report having occasional difficulty when they were younger than the applicant. Specifically, they experienced discomfort when asking sexual behavior questions of volunteers old enough to be their parent. Overall, however, case managers stated that their anxiety concerning the personal interview diminished with experience.

References

Agencies require three or four references from each applicant, typically two or three from friends and one from an employer. Persons who serve as references complete a standardized form that collects descriptive information on their relationship with the applicant, and their opinion of the applicant's fitness to work with children. Staff reported that references seem willing to express doubts about an applicant's ability to serve as a volunteer.

Staff typically do not eliminate an applicant based solely on a bad reference. Instead, the case manager will look for confirmation in the personal interview or another screening step. The only exception is if a reference expresses concern that the applicant might pose a threat to a child's safety.

Staff often complained that collecting references slows the screening process. However, our data show that this is not generally the case. On average, it took 25 days (N=749) for all of an applicant's references to be returned, only two days longer than the average span for the criminal records check, which runs concurrently.

Psychological Testing

Before providing liability insurance that includes child sexual abuse coverage, the primary insurer of BB/BS requires an agency to either administer a psychological test or have volunteers, parents and clients take part in a child abuse education and prevention training program called EMPOWER.

Agency staff who administer psychological tests do so to help them detect inappropriate volunteers. Three study agencies require volunteers to complete a psychological test that screens for undesirable personality traits; each uses a different test that measures slightly different characteristics.[8] Tests are self-administered in agency offices, and can take from one to two-and-a-half hours. In one agency, the test is administered immediately after a person submits an application, and additional screening steps are not taken until an applicant "passes" the test.[9] This study agency had the highest percentage (55.6%) of applicants who withdrew or had their application rejected during the study period. The other two agencies do not use test results as an absolute screen.

While executive directors at the three agencies spoke favorably of the tests, few case managers said they found the test useful. Their reactions reflected hostility, indifference and/or a belief that the tests were a waste of time. Most of the case managers who both interviewed applicants and reviewed the results of their psychological tests said they relied primarily on the interview in making an evaluation.

The majority of focus group participants who took the psychological tests also had a negative reaction--variously describing the tests as "unnecessary," "bizarre," "repetitive," "too long" and "annoying." To a degree, their reactions corresponded to the test taken: focus group participants "did not understand the usefulness" of the PSI-5S or 16PF, and viewed the MMPI as "bizarre." Regardless of the test, few participants understood its purpose or how the agency would use the results. Their comments suggest that agency staff could have allayed most of their concerns by providing a more detailed explanation of the test and how it would be used:

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[8] Tests approved for use by the insurance company include the Minnesota Multi-Phasic Inventory (MMPI), PSI-5S, 16PF, the California Psychological Inventory (CPI), the Child Abuse Potential Inventory (CAP), the Hogan Personality Inventory (HPI), the Clinical Analysis Questionnaire (CAQ), and a variant of PSI-5S.

[9] The agency that uses the test results as an absolute screen rejected, solely on the basis of their test scores, 27.4 percent of volunteers who submitted an application between February 1, 1993 and October 31, 1993.

> You could tell that it was designed for an employment situation, so I question the value of doing it. It didn't seem like it really applied to this kind of relationship. (Matched)

> I was taking that test and after a while I'm not reading the questions . . . it's just because you were answering the same questions over and over again, and after a while, I'm thinking more into the question than what's there . . . they're probably thinking I'm an ax murderer . . . [but] I'm a good guy. (Applied-In Process)

EMPOWER

The five study agencies that do not use psychological tests--and many agencies that do--use EMPOWER, a training program with separate components for volunteers, children and parents. It is designed to prevent child abuse and teach its respective audiences to identify the symptoms of such abuse. The BB/BSA EMPOWER implementation guide encourages local agencies to administer the program: "Although testing can be valuable, at best it only serves as a means to identify some factors that may suggest that a match is inappropriate. The major limitation of testing only is that it does not train the volunteer to help teens and children avoid being victimized. Nor is testing a reliable means of identifying sexual abusers" (BB/BSA, 1991).

Staff from one agency, in describing why they chose EMPOWER rather than administer psychological tests, characterized EMPOWER as a proactive means of preventing child abuse. Several other agencies felt that psychological tests were either too costly, too time-consuming or not the most appropriate means of identifying potential child abusers.

Home Assessment

One of the final steps in the screening process is a case manager visit to the applicant's home. The case manager evaluates the home's safety, meets other members of the household, ascertains whether the lifestyle described by the applicant is consistent with his or her home environment, and looks for warning signs of a potential child abuser.

Case managers report that they rarely reject an applicant as a result of a home visit; when they do screen out applicants, it is usually for obvious reasons (e.g., diabetic needles lying on the living room floor). Case managers cited important benefits unrelated to the screening process, however, such as developing further rapport with the volunteer.

The nature of home assessments varies dramatically across the study agencies. While some case managers simply sit in the living room and talk with the volunteer, others conduct what applicants considered to be invasive home assessments. These applicants said that the case managers' actions included examining closets, opening drawers, and inspecting the bedrooms of other household members, including parents. In fact, one study agency's policy is to have

case managers act in a deliberately confrontational manner during the visit. For example, the case managers demand to know where dangerous items, such as guns and knives, are kept--without first asking whether the applicant possesses any of the items. The stated purpose of this policy is that the confrontational manner might catch volunteers off guard and they might admit something they had denied earlier, such as owning a gun.

Focus group participants generally accepted the necessity of the home visit because of the need to place a child in a safe environment. However, some expressed surprise at the invasive nature of the visit, particularly as it involved other members of the household. A particular worry was that the case manager would disclose to household members (e.g., parents) confidential information learned during the applicant's personal interview. A more detailed explanation of the purpose of the visit and the procedures that would be followed would have alleviated many of the applicants' concerns:

> They talked to my mother . . . and made me leave the room. Here I was, like a little kid peeking around the hallway, trying to hear what is she asking her. I'm like, "Oh God, don't say too much, Mom." I just knew that [the case manager was] going to say, do you know your child has had sex? (Applied-In Process)

> I think the only thing I was surprised at was during the home visit, he asked to see my parents' room. And my sister's room. (Applied-In Process)

Training

Five agencies conduct volunteer training prior to the match. Training generally consists of a presentation on the developmental stages of youth, tips on relationship-building and recommendations on the best way to interact with a Little Brother or Little Sister. Although training typically occurs before a match is made, its role in screening is minimal, as most applicants have been formally accepted pending their attendance. Staff reported that if a case manager has questions about a volunteer's appropriateness, the trainer might observe his or her behavior; however, staff rarely screen out volunteers based on their performance during training.

RESOLUTION OF VOLUNTEER APPLICATIONS

The decision to accept a volunteer is based on both objective and subjective information. First, the objective screening criteria are reviewed. If the volunteer fails to meet any objective eligibility criteria, agency staff immediately terminate his or her application. Second, the case manager completes a report that summarizes what is known and recommends acceptance or rejection of the volunteer. The primary data source is usually the personal interview, though staff typically consider the home visit and references in making the decision.

The study agencies make decisions on whether to accept volunteers in four ways. Three agencies require case managers to prepare reports and either submit them to their supervisor

or present their analysis at a staff meeting where the final decision is made by the group. In two agencies, management staff, not case managers, process volunteers and make the decision on acceptance. In two agencies, the decision rests solely with the case managers, regardless of their level of experience. In the remaining agency, more experienced case managers are allowed to make final decisions, while less experienced case managers need approval for their decisions.

Agencies differ in the amount of explanation they give a volunteer who is rejected. Two study agencies inform volunteers by sending a form letter that gives no specific reason for rejection; two other agencies also send volunteers a letter but do include the reasons for rejection. The other four agencies tell volunteers the reason either over the telephone or in person. Management staff in the two agencies that do not disclose the reason for rejection gave concern over potential lawsuits as their primary rationale. All agencies that sent letters said they did so to avoid placing the case manager in a position that might be uncomfortable.

Volunteers at the two nondisclosing agencies expressed surprise and disappointment on learning that they would not be told the reason if rejected:

> At the orientation someone asked what happens if you're rejected, and the response was, "Well, we can't tell you why, we'll just tell you that you weren't acceptable." Well, it was really just like a mysterious non-answer. So it just sort of invited more questions. (Matched)

Telling volunteers the reason for their rejection requires tact. A focus group participant chastised one case manager for her performance in this area:

> They called me up Friday, and told me that they had rejected me because I'm going to a counselor . . . it bothered me 'cause I was up front about it and the counseling doesn't deal with kids or anything like that . . . first, they lied about why they rejected me, and then I finally got it out . . . she [the case manager] says after counseling if you want to give us a try, please feel free to call. Forget it. You rejected me once, I'm not going to give you a chance to reject me again. (Applied-In Process)

SUMMARY

BB/BS agencies' volunteer intake process is the most thorough of the mentoring programs we have examined. It includes an application, orientation, criminal records check, references, personal interview and home assessment. While BB/BSA mandates certain procedures, it permits local variation in how each is implemented.

Meeting the objective screening criteria is the first step in the process. If volunteers fail to meet any objective eligibility criteria, their applications are immediately rejected. Beyond

these criteria, staff judgment is crucial in determining whether an applicant will be accepted and matched.

Staff discretion is of particular importance at several points in the process, beginning with the inquiry call, which is often an applicant's first personal contact with the agency. The performance of agency staff also greatly influences whether an applicant decides to continue with the intake process. Focus group participants who decided not to continue the process often cited as a contributing factor a negative encounter with agency staff, such as their refusal to answer all questions during the inquiry call.

Staff performance at orientation sessions is equally important. While most focus group participants were satisfied with the level of information presented at the orientation, a few expressed dissatisfaction that the person conducting the orientation was not well-informed about agency procedures and did not allot enough time to answer all questions.

The personal interview, described by agency staff as the centerpiece of the screening process, helps staff determine whether applicants pose a safety risk to the child or are unlikely to honor their commitment. While applicants often expressed surprise at the thoroughness of the process and the nature of the questions posed during the personal interview, most said that on reflection they understood why this was necessary. Several also remarked that a willingness on the part of staff to answer questions put them at ease during the personal interview.

Agencies differ in the amount of explanation they provide to applicants who are rejected at the conclusion of the process. Two study agencies do not provide the reasons for rejection; management staff attribute this to concern about lawsuits and placing case managers in a potentially uncomfortable position. However, focus group participants expressed surprise and disappointment on learning that they would not be told the reason if rejected.

IV. THE SCREENING PROCESS: LENGTH, ATTRITION AND RESULTS

This chapter documents the percentage of those inquiring who submitted an application or attended an orientation at the study agencies, how these applications were resolved, the length of the screening process, and the extent to which applicants' gender, race, age or education level affects their likelihood of continuing the process and being matched with a Little Brother or Little Sister.

LENGTH AND ATTRITION

Staff consistently reported that it took "a long time" to process volunteers. To investigate what "long" actually means--and how various groups of volunteers fare in the screening process--participating agencies collected data--including date of birth, race, gender and education level--for each new person inquiring between February and July 1993. Agencies then tracked all volunteers until either October 31, 1993 or the date on which their applications were resolved, recording the dates at which a volunteer began and ended each step. For analysis purposes, the screening process has been divided into two stages: (1) from initial inquiry to initiation of the application process[10] and (2) from application to resolution.

Across the eight study agencies, only 43.4 percent of those making an inquiry during the study period initiated the application process. This percentage varied by agency, as shown in Table 3. Individuals at Agency H were the most likely to follow up on their initial inquiry, as 72 percent initiated the application process. This high conversion rate might be attributable to the agency's practice of conducting applicant orientations at recruitment events. Agency D had the lowest conversion rate (21.9%).

Individuals who ultimately applied averaged approximately two weeks from initial inquiry to application, except at Agency H (one day) and Agency G (4.3 weeks). Because Agency H orients applicants at recruitment events, inquiry and orientation often occurred on the same day. The long pre-application period for Agency G might be attributable to two of its policies: it delays mailing applications to individuals who live in areas where there are no waiting youth; and, according to focus group participants, it schedules relatively infrequent orientation sessions.

After applying, individuals can be assigned a Little Brother or Little Sister (what we classify as "matched"), can withdraw voluntarily, or can be deemed inappropriate for the program (both of the latter groups are classified as "resolved-not matched"). For research purposes, we classify as "unresolved" those applicants who had not completed all steps in the process by the end of the study period. Voluntary withdrawals and rejections are grouped together because at least two agencies are reluctant to tell an applicant or even record the reason an

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[10] In five study agencies, initiation of the application process consists of completing an application; in the remaining three, the process begins with attendance at an orientation.

Table 3

NUMBER OF ADULTS INQUIRING ABOUT SERVICE AS A BIG BROTHER OR BIG SISTER FROM FEBRUARY TO JULY 1993 AND NUMBER APPLYING BY AGENCY

AGENCY	NUMBER INQUIRING	NUMBER APPLYING[a]	PERCENTAGE APPLYING
A	451	190	42.1
B	498	265	53.2
C	301	133	44.2
D	475	104	21.9
E	246	135	54.9
F	146	69	47.3
G	240	77	32.1
H	175	126	72.0
TOTAL	2,532	1,099	43.4

NOTE: Number applying includes those at five agencies that require volunteers to submit an application as the step immediately following their initial inquiry and three agencies that require volunteers to attend an orientation as the step immediately following their initial inquiry.

[a] Category includes adults who applied on or before October 31, 1993.

applicant is considered inappropriate. Thus, when an agency reports that an applicant withdrew, it is difficult to know whether the withdrawal was voluntary or the agency deemed the applicant inappropriate. As shown in Table 4, at the end of the study period (October 31, 1993), 27.8 percent of the 1,099 individuals who had applied at study agencies had been matched, 29.8 were resolved-not matched, 35 percent were unresolved, and 7.4 percent had successfully completed all screening procedures but were not yet matched.[11]

Agencies varied dramatically in the number of unresolved applicants. Agency G had the highest percentage of unresolved cases over the study period (63.6%); meanwhile, Agency C had the lowest number of unresolved cases (14.3%), but the highest number of accepted but not matched volunteers (25.6%). Agency E had the second lowest percentage of unresolved cases (18.5%) and the highest percentage of resolved-not matched (55.6%), due primarily to its use of the psychological test, which screened out 27.4 percent of applicants.

Contrary to the impressions of case managers, screening components, such as police checks and references, are not the major contributors to the length of the intake process--at least in the eight study agencies. Rather, the availability of staff to conduct the other components of the volunteer intake process seems to be a more important major factor. Staff from BB/BSA and two agencies reported that staff availability was a major impediment, since case managers' responsibilities included supervising matches and fundraising as well as youth intake. A few volunteers in the focus groups also said that agencies did not seem to have sufficient staff available to process applications expeditiously.

Since data collection ceased before agency staff resolved the status of all applicants, any report on the average time from application to match would underestimate the figure. Further complicating our analysis is the fact that individuals applied at various times, ranging from three to nine months prior to the conclusion of data collection.

Given the importance of knowing the time it takes to complete the application process, however, we used a life-table analysis to estimate what percentage of applicants would be matched over a 36-week period (approximately eight months). This type of analysis is based on the length of time it takes to process an application, while controlling for the fact that not all applications in the study were in the system for 36 weeks. Using this method, we estimate that after 36 weeks, 37.3 percent of applicants at the study agencies would be matched with a Little Brother or Little Sister.

Figure 2 shows the cumulative percentage of volunteers who would be matched over the eight months. Virtually no one is matched during the first six weeks. From approximately Week 7 through Week 20, however, the percentage matched increases at a steady rate. The percentage matched continues to grow after Week 20, though at a slower rate.

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[11] All applicants had made their inquiries a minimum of three months and a maximum of nine months earlier.

Table 4

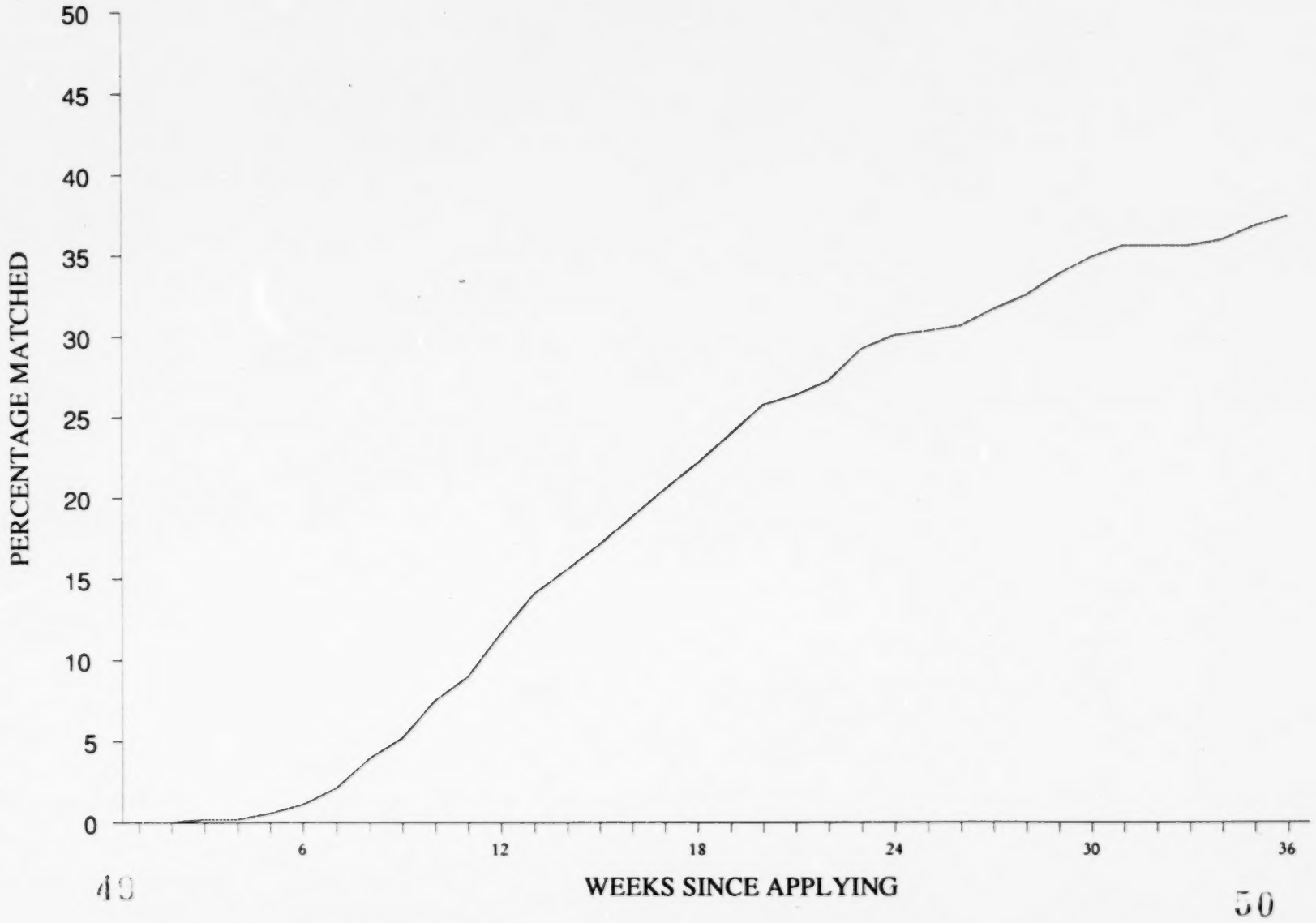
STATUS OF APPLICANTS BY AGENCY

AGENCY	MATCHED	ACCEPTED BUT NOT MATCHED	RESOLVED-NOT MATCHED	UNRESOLVED	TOTAL
A	11.6%	14.7%	40.5%	33.2%	100% (N=190)
B	36.2	0	10.6	53.2	100 (N=265)
C	25.6	25.6	34.6	14.3	100 (N=133)
D	41.4	7.7	28.9	20.1	100 (N=104)
E	25.9	0	55.6	18.5	100 (N=135)
F	52.2	0	29.0	18.8	100 (N=69)
G	6.5	0	29.9	63.6	100 (N=77)
H	27.8	8.7	22.2	41.3	100 (N=127)
TOTAL	27.8%	7.4%	29.8%	35.4%	100% (N=1,099)

NOTE: Applicants applied between February and July 1993. Agencies processed applications between February and October 1993.

Figure 2

ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF VOLUNTEERS MATCHED BY NUMBER OF WEEKS FROM APPLICATION



NOTE: Estimates developed using a life-table analysis.

RESULTS

An important research question is whether a person's gender, race, age or education level affects the likelihood that he or she will complete an application or be matched. Since agencies make matches based on race and gender, we separated potential volunteers into four groups based on these characteristics: white males, minority males, minority females and white females. Volunteers were also grouped by three education categories--no college, some college and college graduates or higher; and by six age categories--less than 20, 20 to 24, 25 to 29, 30 to 34, 35 to 39, and 40 and older.

Holding other factors constant, we examined how race/gender, education, age and agency influenced the likelihood of reaching various stages in the screening process (Table 5).[12] For each characteristic, a reference group was arbitrarily selected and the other groups were compared with it. For example, to analyze potential volunteers by race/gender, we compared minority females, white males and minority males with white females. The other reference groups were individuals 30 to 34 years of age, and those with some college experience.

Reference groups are indicated in Table 5 by shading and a standard value of 1.0. A value greater than 1.0 means the group was more likely than the reference group to apply, be matched or be resolved-not matched; a value less than 1.0 means the group was less likely than the reference group to apply, be matched or be resolved-not matched. Thus, for the first entry in Table 5, 1.07 means that a minority male was 7 percent more likely to apply after his initial inquiry than a white female given that the two volunteers were the same with respect to age, education and agency. Similarly, the entry of 0.93 in the first column indicates that an applicant aged 25 to 29 was seven percent less likely to apply than a 30- to 34-year-old applicant, given the same education, race/gender and agency.

In Table 5, we find that the probability of applying did not differ significantly by the race/gender or age of an individual during the study period. However, there were significant differences by education. An inquiring individual with no college experience was 21 percent less likely to apply than a similar individual with some college experience, and an individual with a college degree was 66 percent more likely to apply than a similar individual with only some college education.

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[12] The numbers in Table 5 are derived from multivariate logit analyses that include race/gender, age, education and agency. We included agency to control for variations due to differences in agency policies, staff performance and staff availability.

Table 5

EFFECTS OF GENDER, AGE AND EDUCATION LEVEL ON INQUIRERS' PROGRESS THROUGH THE BB/BS VOLUNTEER INTAKE PROCESS

	I INQUIRERS' ODDS OF APPLYING	II APPLICANTS' ODDS OF BEING MATCHED	III APPLICANTS' ODDS OF BEING RESOLVED-NOT MATCHED	IV INTERVIEWED APPLICANTS' ODDS OF BEING MATCHED
Race/Gender				
Minority Male	1.07	.71	2.25***	1.18
White Male	1.10	1.31	1.08	1.82***
Minority Female	.88	1.95***	.65	2.23***
White Female	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Age				
Under 20	.77	.26**	2.67*	.30**
20-24	1.02	.69*	1.75**	.84
25-29	.93	.67*	1.50	.88
30-34	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
35-39	.82	.65	2.05*	.66
40+	1.01	.54**	1.69	.52*
Education				
No College	.79*	.86	1.76**	.90
Some College	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
College Graduate	1.66***	1.51**	.51***	1.22
Sample Size	2,250	1,015	659	580

*** The difference between this group and the reference group on this variable is statistically significant at the .01 level.
** The difference between this group and the reference group on this variable is statistically significant at the .05 level.
* The difference between this group and the reference group on this variable is statistically significant at the .10 level.

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The second column of Table 5 indicates the relative odds of being matched within the study period (February 1, 1993 to October 31, 1993).[13] Of the four race/gender groups, minority females had the greatest likelihood of being matched; they were 95 percent more likely to be matched than white females. The odds that white males and minority males would be matched did not differ significantly from those of white females.

Applicants aged 30 to 34--the reference age group--were the most likely to be matched, with teenage applicants a considerable 74 percent less likely. Applicants aged 20 to 24, 25 to 29, and 40 and older were also significantly less likely to be matched than were the 30- to 34-year-olds. The probability of an applicant being matched increased with education. College graduates were 51 percent more likely to be matched than applicants with only some college education. However, the likelihood of being matched did not differ significantly for those with some college and those with no college experience.

We also examined the characteristics of individuals whose application status was resolved-not matched.[14] Minority males were significantly more likely to be resolved-not matched than were the other race/gender groups during the time period of the study. In fact, minority males were 125 percent more likely to be resolved-not matched than the reference group--white females. We also found that applicants under age 20 were resolved-not matched at a rate almost three times greater than 30- to 34-year-old applicants. College graduates were about one-half as likely to be resolved-not matched as applicants with some college, and applicants with no college were 76 percent more likely to be resolved-not matched than those with some college.

The final issue we examined was the likelihood that an applicant would be matched given that he or she had a personal interview, which was cited by case managers as the most critical step in the screening process. Agencies have different policies regarding the point at which a case manager can conduct the personal interview; because it requires substantial staff time, however, it is usually one of the last steps in the screening process. Thus, for the most part, applicants who reach this stage have passed all outside record checks and have met all testing criteria.

During our study period, minority females--and to a lesser extent, white males who went through the personal interview--were about twice as likely to be matched as white females or minority males who reached that stage. White female applicants who had a personal inter-

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[13] Because of the fixed study period, columns 2, 3 and 4 include a high proportion of cases that could be resolved quickly--that is, cases where references sent back their letters quickly, outside record checks were completed in a timely fashion, and volunteers and agency staff made available sufficient time to complete the personal interview, attend training sessions and take psychological tests (where appropriate). Therefore, cases that were resolved after a long period are not accounted for.

[14] The resolved-not matched category includes applicants considered inappropriate for the program by agency staff and those who withdrew voluntarily.

view had the lowest match rate. Age was less of a factor at this stage, except among the youngest and oldest applicants. Applicants younger than age 20 were 70 percent less likely than 30- to 34-year-olds to receive a Little Brother or Little Sister; applicants 40 and older were 48 percent less likely than 30- to 34-year-olds to receive a Little Brother or Little Sister. The differences between the reference group and the remaining age groups were not statistically significant. Although college graduates were more successful at completing every other stage of the screening process, those who completed a personal interview were not significantly more likely to be matched than other applicants who had done so.

SUMMARY

Our examination of the volunteer screening process at eight BB/BS agencies from February 1, 1993 to October 31, 1993 showed the following:

- Our life-table analysis shows that over a 36-week period, just over one-third (37.3%) of applicants become Big Brothers or Big Sisters at the study agencies.

- During the study period, there were no significant differences in the likelihood that an inquirer would apply based on race/gender or age; however, those with a college degree were significantly more likely to apply than those without one, controlling for age, race/gender and agency.

- When age, education and agency are controlled, minority female applicants--and, to a lesser extent, white male applicants who completed the personal interview--were more likely to be matched at the study agencies.

- When age, race/gender and agency are controlled, applicants with a college education were more likely to be matched than those with less education during the study period. However, this difference between college-educated and noncollege-educated applicants occurs before the personal interview. Among applicants who completed the personal interview, education level did not affect the likelihood of being matched.

- Applicants below the age of 20, or 40 and over were less likely to be matched during the study period than were 30- to 34-year-olds, with race/gender, education and agency controlled.

We cannot explain all differentials that exist among race/gender, education and age. However, the finding that applicants below the age of 20, or 40 and over were less likely to be matched, controlling for other factors, is consistent with the comments of agency staff. Staff look for stability in an applicant's life, often citing long-term relationships with dating partners and continuity of employment as evidence of stability. Applicants under age 20 are less likely to have had these experiences. Although staff did not suggest that they had problems accepting older applicants, they reported that Little Brothers and Little Sisters prefer a youn-

ger mentor, perhaps explaining the lower probability of applicants age 40 and older being matched.

The reasons minority female and white male applicants in the study were more likely to be matched than minority male and white female applicants are far less clear. We believe that minority female applicants might fare better than white female applicants simply because more white females apply than there are white girls on the waiting list; thus, agency staff do not even attempt to match some white female applicants. However, we cannot explain why minority males are less likely to be matched.

If only about one-third of applicants nationwide are matched within 36 weeks, as we found in our sample, two issues arise. The first is that agencies must generate a large number of inquiries to make a specific number of matches. For example, our analysis shows that for these agencies to make 100 matches within eight months, they would have to generate 618 inquiries and process 268 applications.[15]

The second issue is the potential effect of the length of the screening process on volunteers and clients. It took 20 weeks (5 months) to match 25 percent of the individuals who applied during the study period, and 16 more weeks to match an additional 12 percent. This is a long time, given that volunteers are generally ready to serve when they come forward.

Finally, we cannot explain why college graduates in the study were more likely to be matched, all other things being equal. The greater attrition among noncollege-educated volunteers during the screening process might result from either self-selection (volunteers may feel they cannot meet all program requirements or are not sufficiently interested), a failure to meet the criteria established by the agencies, or a preference on the part of staff for college-educated mentors. Among those who completed the personal interview, the likelihood of college graduates being matched is similar to that of noncollege-educated applicants. Thus, whatever prompts a disproportionate number of noncollege-educated persons to withdraw from the process or be rejected occurs early in the process.

[15] This estimate is based on 43.4 percent of inquirers applying and 37.3 percent of those applicants being matched over a 36-week period.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study traced the process by which eight BB/BS agencies recruit and screen volunteers. We have described current recruitment efforts; provided data on adults who inquired; described how they progressed through the checks BB/BS agencies employ to ensure volunteers meet the eligibility criteria; and examined whether applicants' race, gender, age or education level affect the likelihood that they will apply or be matched with a child.

The study was undertaken to illuminate the issues involved in meeting the huge demand for additional mentors in an efficient manner. BB/BS agencies have a large number of young people on their waiting lists. However, simply recruiting additional volunteers is not a sufficient solution. They must undergo a screening process to ensure that only committed and qualified adults are accepted into the program, in the hope that the relationships that form will enhance the lives of both participants.

Making a match is merely the first step toward a productive, supportive relationship between mentor and child. Our earlier research (Styles and Morrow, 1992; Mecartney, Styles and Morrow, 1994; Tierney and Branch, 1992) has shown that without consistent meetings, the chances of a mentoring intervention achieving desired outcomes are significantly reduced. Ensuring that the persons who volunteer are committed to both the youth and the program is seen as a prerequisite to achieving consistent meetings.

This chapter presents our conclusions and recommendations for improving current procedures, and suggests areas deserving further inquiry.

CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from focus group discussions and research data on the BB/BS volunteer applicant pool at the eight study agencies:

- BB/BS advertising campaigns and PSAs contribute to the high name recognition the program enjoys, and increase the probability that an individual will choose to volunteer with a BB/BS agency. Formal and informal word-of-mouth efforts also help inform and remind the general public of BB/BS volunteer opportunities.

- Even though PASS IT ON and other targeted recruitment strategies have generated increased numbers of minority volunteers since 1990, local agency and BB/BSA staff still need to recruit additional minority volunteers. However, the comments of focus group participants from the study agencies suggest that minorities may be hesitant to volunteer due to a lack of knowledge about the program.

- The success of BB/BS volunteer screening depends on agency staff performance. Ultimately, volunteers' views of the program are influenced by their interactions with

agency staff, whose performance is particularly important during the inquiry call and orientation. In some instances, the performance of agency staff caused volunteers at the study agencies to abandon the screening process.

- Volunteers from the study agencies who participated in focus groups expressed surprise at the intrusiveness of most steps in the screening process, especially the personal interview. However, most focus group participants said they understood the need for a thorough screening process.

- A crucial part of screening is an assessment of a volunteer's commitment to the program, as agencies want to ensure that volunteers will honor the meeting requirement (usually three to five hours per week for one year). BB/BS agencies determine applicants' commitment by examining the stability of their employment history and residency, their persistence in completing each step, and their relationships with friends, relatives and dating partners.

- When recruiting applicants and making matches, many agencies consider the residential location of the volunteer relative to that of the youth. In agencies where this consideration translates into an objective screening criterion, an otherwise acceptable volunteer might not be matched if there are no waiting youth in his or her neighborhood.

- Minority females and white males were the applicants most likely to be matched in the eight study agencies. Applicants under age 20 or those 40 years and older were significantly less likely to be matched with a Little Brother or Little Sister.

- Persons with a college education were more likely to be matched than noncollege-educated individuals during the study period. This may be due to self-selection, failure to meet agency screening criteria or staff preference for college-educated mentors.

- At all eight study agencies, the volunteer screening process is lengthy. Applicants had been in the system from three to nine months at the conclusion of the study period, and 35 percent still did not have their application status resolved. This may be due to the fact that agency staff are responsible for other tasks, such as youth intake, match supervision and fundraising, thus limiting the time available to conduct volunteer screening.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While a number of practices contribute to the success of BB/BS in finding constructive and committed volunteers, there are areas in which further examination might reveal ways to strengthen the BB/BS process. Primarily, these areas are staff performance, recruitment and intake.

Staff Performance

Agency management should carefully monitor all interactions between staff and volunteers during the screening process. In particular, staff responsible for handling the inquiry call should be given feedback on their performance. The volunteer's opinion of the agency is largely shaped by his or her initial interaction with staff on the phone, and the importance of this first contact should not be minimized. In fact, 56.6 percent of persons who inquired about volunteering during the study period decided not to continue the process. While self-selection undoubtedly accounts for a substantial portion of this attrition, our focus groups indicated that some inquiries were handled poorly. Any attrition due to inconsistent handling by staff should be eliminated by setting guidelines and emphasizing the importance of the first contact. Spending time with volunteers during the initial call is important, since even persons who never apply might still support the agency in other ways--e.g., by donating money or encouraging friends to apply.

Recruitment

BB/BSA and agency staff should carefully evaluate their recruitment materials, focusing on whether the materials appeal to people from diverse educational and racial backgrounds. BB/BSA and local agency staff agree that they want to attract more minority volunteers--particularly in light of the high number of minority boys on BB/BS waiting lists. However, the comments of focus group participants suggest that minorities and persons of limited economic means may be hesitant to volunteer.

We would encourage agencies to further develop targeted recruitment strategies. Such customized appeals would be consistent with successful strategies used by marketers of consumer goods (Bessen, 1993). Since BB/BSA has already established a relationship with a national black fraternity, we recommend that they also establish relationships with organizations that involve black adults and those from other minority groups--preferably organizations that do not limit their membership to persons who have attended college.

A disproportionate number of youth requesting services live in neighborhoods that produce few volunteers. Agencies are reluctant to match volunteers from other communities because staff believe that the pair's likelihood of meeting diminishes as the commute increases. However, to serve these youth, agencies could consider recruiting and matching adults who have a demonstrable link to the communities where the youth reside, even if they do not live there. For example, the agency could recruit persons who were raised in the area and who, since relocating, have continued to maintain strong ties with the neighborhood through family members, friends or church. Staff should carefully monitor these matches to determine whether they are of similar duration and success and require the same level of supervision as traditional matches.

Intake

For the most part, the intake process employed by BB/BS agencies seems appropriate. However, two trends in the data we collected suggest the need for self-assessment by BB/BS agencies. First, the differential in the likelihood that college-educated and noncollege-educated persons will proceed to the interview stage deserves further inquiry. This difference, almost entirely accounted for early in the screening process, could be the result of self-selection, agency screening criteria or staff preference; BB/BS agencies should explore these effects and determine whether any other factors come into play. Agencies should also examine why nonwhite males are less likely to complete the process, especially given that many agency waiting lists are overwhelmingly composed of minority boys.

Agencies might also look further into ways of reducing the length of time necessary to resolve volunteer applications. At the conclusion of the study period, agency staff had not resolved 35 percent of all applications. Limited staff capacity undoubtedly contributes to this delay. Also, agencies establish maximum caseloads for case managers; those who are near the limit might be reluctant to resolve volunteer applications in the most efficient manner because they cannot exceed their caseload size. One of the hallmarks of the BB/BS model is consistent supervision of matches, and we would encourage continuation of this practice. Our own research consistently indicates that the level and content of supervision provided can contribute to match longevity (Furano et al., 1993; Tierney and Branch, 1992). However, the need to maintain manageable caseloads must be balanced with the necessity of resolving applications as quickly as possible.

The screening process BB/BS has in place, while lengthy, is designed to protect the children by identifying and screening out inappropriate applicants who would pose a safety risk, be unlikely to honor their time commitment or be unlikely to form positive relationships with the youth. Because the length and thoroughness of the process might dissuade some appropriate participants, rigorous review and possible streamlining are warranted. However, agencies must remain sensitive to the inherent tension between the desire to pass appropriate volunteers through the system quickly and the need to protect the youth by screening out inappropriate volunteers.

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APPENDIX

METHODOLOGY

The analyses were conducted using data from interviews with agency staff, agency records, and focus groups of adults who inquired about serving as Big Brothers/Big Sisters as well as matched volunteers.

INTERVIEWS WITH AGENCY STAFF

P/PV researchers interviewed staff from all eight study agencies. Staff from three agencies were interviewed during the 1993 Annual BB/BSA Conference in Orlando, Florida. Interviews were conducted with at least two staff from each of these three agencies, including either the executive director or program director. At a fourth agency, a telephone interview was conducted with a senior staff member in charge of volunteer recruitment and training. P/PV staff made site visits to the final four study agencies (Agencies A, B, E and G) during Summer 1993. During these visits, P/PV researchers interviewed the executive director, program director, recruitment director (where appropriate), and other staff associated with volunteer recruitment and screening.

FOCUS GROUPS

At four study agencies (Agencies A, B, E and G), focus groups were conducted to obtain the perspective of potential and matched volunteers concerning the recruitment and screening methods of the local agency.

Focus group discussions are a means of exploring respondent awareness, concerns, beliefs and experiences related to a particular topic. A focus group is led by an experienced moderator who guides the discussion to identify points of consensus as well as differing views and the reasons behind such differences.

Focus groups provide qualitative feedback rather than the type of statistical results obtained from sample surveys. Focus group results are not statistically representative in the way a sample survey is; however, different kinds of groups can be designed to represent key groups in the universe. The moderator uses a topical outline that is analogous to a questionnaire in a formal survey. However, this outline is more general, listing issues or areas of inquiry that serve as a guide to the moderator.

Individuals were placed in one of four focus groups: Female Inquiry (women who had inquired, but had not submitted an application), Male Inquiry (men who had inquired, but had not submitted an application), Applied-In Process (persons who had submitted an application but had not been matched at the time of the focus group), and Matched (volunteers who had been matched with a child for less than one year).

Based on data collected during the course of the study, agency staff provided lists of persons whose profiles matched one of the first three categories. From these lists, P/PV staff randomly selected persons to participate in the focus groups, making sure that there was racial diversity and, where appropriate, gender diversity among the participants. For the last group, matched volunteers, agency staff selected the participants, making sure there was racial and gender diversity.

Fifteen focus groups were held, and a total of 73 persons participated. Each session was recorded on audiotape. All focus groups were led by a moderator skilled in focus group techniques. An assistant moderator was also present and was responsible for ensuring that the recording equipment operated properly and participants were paid. Each participant received $20 for the sessions, which lasted approximately one hour.

The same topical outline was used for all 15 focus groups and centered on the participants' recollections, thoughts and opinions about the following:

- How they learned about BB/BS;
- The information they received from the agency, either in the mail or on the telephone;
- The factors that influenced their decision to withdraw or continue the process of becoming a Big Brother/Big Sister;
- How comfortable they were with the application process and their interactions with agency staff; and
- Steps the agencies could take to get more adults to volunteer.

Tapes from the focus group discussions were transcribed and transcriptions were used by P/PV staff to content-analyze participants' statements to identify major themes that emerged across agencies. When participants from one agency had comments that deviated from the majority of respondents, P/PV staff noted the discrepancy. Relevant quotes from the focus groups are included in the text to illustrate major points.

AGENCY RECORDS

We asked staff from all eight study agencies to record, from February 1, 1993 to July 31, 1993, the date of birth, race, gender and education level of all adults who inquired about becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister.[1] Staff also recorded a series of key dates in the screening process. The dates recorded include those of the inquiry call, follow-up call regarding an application, acknowledgment letter sent, orientation, assignment to case manager, first

[1] To test the data collection strategy, Agency G began data collection January 1, 1993.

interview, second interview, home visit, spouse/roommate interview, psychological test, interview with therapist, proof of vehicle insurance, fingerprinting, training, final outcome (accepted or rejected), acceptance letter sent, available for match, pre-match interview, termination date, and match date.

Several screening steps were identified that involve the volunteer, their references or a government agency responding to a request for information from agency staff. Staff recorded the dates on which these steps began and ended, including the application, reference check, personal information form, release of information form, criminal records check, driver's license check, and child abuse registry review. Also collected was the reason staff terminated a volunteer's application. Not every agency followed each of these steps, but each step is used by at least one agency.

As a matter of policy, local agencies extensively document applicants' progress through the screening process; thus, in most cases, they were already collecting the data needed for the study. The key differences for most sites involved collecting the date of birth, race, gender and education level at the time of the inquiry call and recording dates on P/PV's data collection form in addition to the case file. Agency staff had an opportunity to check the reliability of the data when they reviewed a draft of the report to identify inconsistencies. One agency discovered discrepancies and the analyses were repeated with additional information on 14 volunteers.

To give agencies a similar period to process volunteers, we selected a common endpoint for data collection, October 31, 1993. Agency G (the test site) has one more month of data, however, because they started collecting data for this study on January 1, 1993 rather than the February 1, 1993 start date used by other agencies. Several agencies provided information on screening steps completed after October 31, 1993. This extra information was included only in the life-table analysis.

From February 1, 1993 to July 31, 1993, 2,532 adults inquired about becoming a Big Brother or Big Sister. Of those, 2,276 (90 percent) supplied their date of birth, race, gender and education level. There were 256 inquirers who did not supply complete demographic information, 212 who did not provide their education level, 203 who did not provide their date of birth, 184 their race, and 95 their gender.[2]

In October 1993, we sent the eight study agencies a list of applicants with missing demographic information and asked for their assistance collecting the missing data. Staff responded as well as they could, but were unable to locate some applicants, particularly those who contacted the agency only once. To a lesser extent, applicants' continued refusal to provide information also limited this effort.

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[2] Age was calculated using date of birth and inquiry date. In addition to the 203 sample members who did not provide their date of birth, 98 did not have an inquiry date recorded in their file. In order to include these sample members in the analysis, we calculated age using the midpoint of the inquiry interval (May 1, 1993).

In Table 2, which presents the demographic characteristics of adults inquiring about the BB/BS program, missing data were excluded on a variable-by-variable basis. For example, if an applicant reported their race and age but not their education level, he or she was included in the race and age calculations but excluded from the reports regarding education level. Table 3 includes all who inquired about becoming a Big Brother or Sister, and Table 4 includes all applicants regardless of missing demographic information.

Since the demographic data are the primary explanatory variables in the logistic regressions, only volunteers who provided complete demographic information (date of birth, race, gender and education level) were included. In the four logistic regression models (Table 5), 9.3 percent of the sample were excluded from the analysis of who completed an application, 7.6 percent from the analysis of who was matched given that the volunteer applied, 7.7 percent from the analysis of the resolved-not matched group, and 4.6 percent from the analysis of who was matched given that they had a personal interview. All applicants were included in the descriptive life-table analysis summarized in Figure 2.

Analytic Strategies

Two statistical procedures--logistic regression and a descriptive life-table--were used in the report.

Logistic Regression Analysis

Since the dependent variables are dichotomous, a nonlinear maximum likelihood estimation technique--logit--was used to estimate the models. The dependent variables are application received; matched, given that the volunteer applied; resolved-not matched, given that the volunteer applied and application status was resolved as not matched, and matched, given that the applicant had the personal interview. A series of dummy variables representing age, education level, race/gender and agency are included in each model. The age dummy variables are age 18 and 19, 20 to 24, 25 to 29, 35 to 39, and 40 and older. Age 30 to 34 is the omitted category. The dummy variables for education level are high school degree or less, including vocational/trade school, and college degree or more. Some college is the omitted category. The race/gender dummy variables are minority male, white male and minority female. White females are the omitted category. Dummy variables for each agency with Agency E as the omitted category are also included in the equations.

Descriptive Life-Table Analysis

Because we stopped collecting data before all applicants completed the screening process, the data set is truncated. Had time permitted, we would have tracked each applicant until they were either matched, withdrew voluntarily or were considered inappropriate for the program. The truncation of the data set prevents us from calculating the true average length of time to complete the screening process. Calculating an average based on only the resolved cases would underestimate the true processing period by ignoring volunteers who did not complete

the process quickly enough for inclusion. However, using one type of hazard-rate analysis--the descriptive life-table method--we can estimate, by week, the probability that a volunteer will be matched controlling for the length of time since the volunteer submitted his or her application. For example, if 100 volunteers began Week 20 (defined as the number of weeks from the date of application) and three were matched during that week, the hazard rate (the probability of the indicated event occurring) for that week is 3/100 or .03. Data for all sample members not matched prior to Week 20 can be used in this calculation.

The descriptive life-table analysis summarized in Figure 2 presents the cumulative probability of being matched, by week, from the time of application to 36 weeks from application (about eight months). The reader should view these results cautiously since they report the probability of being matched for all applicants--there are no controls for age, race, gender, education level or agency.